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Atari Online News, Etc.
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Dana P. Jacobson, Publisher/Managing Editor
Joseph Mirando, Managing Editor
Rob Mahlert, Associate Editor

Atari Online News, Etc. Staff

Dana P. Jacobson -- Editor
Joe Mirando -- "People Are Talking"
Michael Burkley -- "Unabashed Atariophile"
Albert Dayes -- "CC: Classic Chips"
Rob Mahlert -- Web site
Thomas J. Andrews -- "Keeper of the Flame"

With Contributions by:

Kevin Savetz

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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Despite some cool nights, and a day of leftover winds and rain from Hurricane Ivan (poor Florida!), it was a pretty good week around here. I even managed to get out of work one day this week and head to Maine for a round of golf. The fall colors are starting to turn, but it's still early yet for the best of the leaf-peeping enjoyment.

All kinds of news out there this week. We range mostly from the usual re-hash of Microsoft trying to weasel out of its penalties by the European Union, to the seemingly never-ending barrage of spam. What caught my eye this week is nothing new, but due to the first presidential candidates debates this week, timely. The article that attracted my attention (see later on in this issue!) was the story of the political parodies that increasingly are popping up all over the web, If you've seen any of these, you'll probably agree with me that they can be hilarious. If you have a few moments, drop by a few of these sights and see what I mean.

Until next time...

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CT60 Firmware Updated

Didier MØquignon has released v1.02 of the CT60 flash TOS/BIOS.

Improvements include:

- New boot features:

* Add identify device procedure for SCSI and IDE drives, the boot wait if a removable drive is not ready.

* Add IDE slave support (device 17).

* Add CompactFlash support.

* Add combined MSDOS/TOS root and partition support, this feature support

byte swapping needed by MSDOS format and search a *.SYS for load the disk driver.

* Add speed test for bootables devices.

- Check and fix modecode get from NVM.

- 4 choices inside the boot order (SCSI and IDE).

http://ct60conf.atari.org/

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. I'm afraid that I won't have anything for you this week. This cold, rainy weather we've been having has been playing hell with my neck and arm. If you've ever had a herniated disc or an associated nerve pain like sciatica, you know that it can be incredibly maddening.

I still don't understand intellectually how changing weather can cause such a difference medically, but I understand it physically.

At least my doctor didn't prescribe Vioxx for me. Of course, most of these new high-tech medications are much more complex than what was available even ten years ago. And with complexity comes room for unforeseen effects. My doctor has, in fact, prescribed a slightly different medication. Unfortunately, its a medication that my insurance company doesn't wish to be burdened with paying for.

Well life is nothing if not interesting, eh?

I'll be back next week, probably full of opinions about the first presidential debate, and ready to hammer you in the head about getting registered to vote.

Have a good week and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - PSP Price Is An Issue!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" Crash Twinsanity Ships!
Shadow Hearts: Covenant!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Price at Issue With PlayStation Portable

Sony Corp.'s PlayStation Portable, which goes on sale in Japan later this year and overseas next spring, boasts the superb image quality of its home-console counterpart. But the big question on everyone's minds is: How much will the handheld gaming machine cost?

The gadget, about the size of a thin paperback, was shown in playable form packed with 22 games ahead of this weekend's annual Tokyo Game Show.

The pricing question is crucial as competition heats up in the game machine market ahead of the holiday season, when video game hardware makers rake in as much as half their annual profits.

Earlier this week, Ken Kutaragi, chief executive of Sony Computer Entertainment, the videogame unit of the electronics and entertainment giant, showed a smaller PlayStation 2 set to go on sale next month, which he said will help cut costs.

Despite widespread speculation, Kutaragi refused to give a price for the PlayStation Portable, or PSP, saying he wants to first gauge reaction at the Tokyo Game Show.

Sony is hoping to repeat what it achieved a decade ago with its original PlayStation, when it rallied from behind to defeat the king of gaming, Sony's domestic rival Nintendo Co., known for its Super Mario and Pokemon games.

Before PlayStation's debut, Nintendo dominated gaming with Family Computer, or Famicom, machines, which went on sale in 1983.

Today, nearly 74 million PlayStation 2 machines have been sold worldwide, making it the dominant system around the world, controlling 47 percent of the U.S. market and about 80 percent of the Japanese and European markets.

But can PSP do the same in handhelds to beat Nintendo's hit portable offering, the Game Boy? Nintendo has sold more than 150 million Game Boy machines around the world so far.

"It's difficult to say anything about the PSP without a price," said Kazuya Yamamoto, analyst with UFJ Tsubasa Securities Co. in Tokyo, adding that retailers expect a price of about 30,000 yen ($271), which may be a trifle steep.

This week, Nintendo said its handheld upgrade, Nintendo DS, a Game Boy with two screens, will sell for $149.99 in the United States and 15,000 yen ($135) in Japan. The machine, which will be available in the U.S. market on

Nov. 21, includes a touch-panel display that allows people to exchange hand-scribbled messages by wireless as well as play new kinds of games.

At the Tokyo Game Show, people were able to try out various PSP games, including "New Ridge Racer," a car-racing game from Namco and "Rengoku: The Tower of Purgatory," a shooting game from Hudson.

It’s clear the PSP offers the smooth dazzling graphics and quick response of the PlayStation 2. Besides the buttons on both sides similar to those on the PlayStation 2, a tiny button on the left works as a miniature joystick.

The 4.3-inch display, which takes up most of the gadget’s surface, feels big enough to play games without straining the eyes.

Still, analysts note some downsides.

First, the PSP uses its own special UMD (Universal Media Disc) optical disc for games, meaning it’s not backwards compatible with other machines, even current PlayStation models.

PlayStation 2, by contrast, can play all the original PlayStation games, which helped keep sales going strong.

People can watch movies on the PSP, but they’d have to buy the special discs. And Sony has been mum on the film lineup.

Eiji Maeda, analyst with Daiwa Institute of Research in Tokyo, believes most people aren’t going to get too excited about watching movies on a portable. They probably won’t be doing that on commuter trains, and you can already do it on flights, he says, so why buy a PSP?

"I sure wouldn’t buy it for that," Maeda said. "Unless there’s aggressive pricing, PSP is going to have a hard time."

Shadow Hearts: Covenant For Playstation 2 Ships To Stores

Midway Games Inc., a leading interactive entertainment publisher and developer, announced that Shadow Hearts: Covenant, sequel to the critically acclaimed role-playing game released in 2001, has shipped to retail outlets nationwide exclusively for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system. Shadow Hearts: Covenant is a deep, engaging RPG that is set in a fantastical world filled with ancient magic, mystical lore, unspeakable curses and a diabolical plot.

Taking place amidst the chaos of World War I six months after the original Shadow Hearts ended, Yuri and Karin embark on a grand journey to conquer a secret society that is taking advantage of the war to fulfill their evil ambitions. Yuri and Karin must test their powers and magic skills to combat terrifying creatures and conquer the evil that Rasputin’s malevolent society plans to unleash upon the world.

The epic adventure that fills 2 DVDs with over 40 hours of intense gameplay brings back its innovative combat system, The Judgment Ring, allowing players to wield the power necessary to fulfill their destiny. Players must combine split second timing and skillful combat strategy to master the Judgment Ring’s powerful and stackable attacks. The improved Judgment Ring allows players to choose which characters to bring to battle and features

new team-based combo attacks and defensive formations. Also featured in Covenant is an inventive magic system where players must build skill sets, strategize gameplay moves, earn and cast spells with a team of complex characters, each with distinct personalities, attributes and magical abilities.

Crash Twinsanity For Playstation 2 And Xbox Ships

Vivendi Universal Games announced Tuesday that Crash Twinsanity, the next installment in the best-selling video game franchise, has shipped to retail stores nationwide. The irrepressible Crash Bandicoot has returned in his funniest adventure yet for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system and the Xbox video game system from Microsoft. Developed by Traveller's Tales, the new action platformer reveals a hilarious storyline that showcases the creative input of award-winning animation filmmaker Jordan Reichek of Perky Pickle Studios and introduces innovative features, including the ingenious pairing of Crash with his longtime nemesis Dr. Cortex in an unprecedented new dual gameplay mechanic.

"By combining the classic humor and wacky situations that Crash is known for with a new twist of inventive gameplay, Crash Twinsanity delivers the most robust and funniest Crash platformer ever," said Philip O'Neil, President of North America, Vivendi Universal Games. "The gameplay and story line in Crash Twinsanity truly raise the bar for this world renowned, character-based franchise."

In Crash Twinsanity, a new evil has invaded the island paradise of Crash Bandicoot with plans of destruction. In a strange twist, Crash begrudgingly pairs with his archenemy, Dr. Cortex, in order to save the world. Through this unorthodox partnership, Cortex is abused as Crash's favorite weapon when Crash and Cortex are controlled as one. Additionally, this dynamic paired gameplay features never-before-seen mechanics which also include cooperative level designs in which Crash must protect Cortex and vice-versa, albeit reluctantly! They're working together - but they don't have to like it!

Gamers can choose from a wacky cast of four playable characters - Crash, Cortex, Nina Cortex (Cortex's niece) and the brand new pairing of Crash and Cortex. The game features completely immersive free-roaming environments which respond realistically as the player interacts with them, along with streaming worlds that can be played through without load times. Players will also encounter complex and highly reactive enemies that will detect and hunt Crash, run away when outgunned and interact with other foes to form alliances.

The Crash Bandicoot franchise made its debut in 1996 and has sold more than 30 million copies worldwide.

Crash Twinsanity is currently available in North America on PlayStation 2 and Xbox for a suggested retail price of $49.99, with an ESRB 'E' rating. For more information, customers can visit: http://twinsanity.crashbandicoot.com/.

Ubisoft's The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee Hits PlayStation 2 and Xbox

Ubisoft announced that The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee is now available in retails stores for the PlayStation2 computer entertainment system and the Xbox video game system from Microsoft, for a suggested retail price of $29.99. Licensed by Warner Bros. Interactive Entertainment and developed by Ratbag Games, The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee is a humorous, action racing game that combines a mission-based adventure with arena-style driving.

Set in Hazzard County, players step into the shoes of Bo and Luke Duke as they race to win prize money in order to save the local orphanage from Boss Hogg's latest crooked scheme. With the help of the ever-popular Daisy Duke, Uncle Jesse and Cooter, the good ol' boys go up against the villainous Boss Hogg and his bumbling cohorts Sheriff Rosco P. Coltrane and Deputy Enos in order to win the Hazzard County Derby. Just like the television show, The Dukes of Hazzard: Return of the General Lee is filled with wild off-road action, gravity-defying stunts and adrenaline-pumping car chases.

Game features include:

-- The Dukes world, the way fans want it: Players explore a virtual Hazzard County full of stunts, races, chases and adventures all tied together by a new story.

-- Dukes Celebrity and Music: Full cast represented from the show, with voice-overs and likenesses from John Schneider (Bo Duke), Tom Wopat (Luke Duke), Catherine Bach (Daisy Duke), James Best (Roscoe P. Coltrane), Ben Jones (Cooter) and Sonny Shroyer (Enos Strate). Also included is Waylon Jennings' signature theme song.

-- Dukes Vehicles: Players can drive a variety of vehicles including the General Lee, the Black Charger, Uncle Jesse's Pickup, Daisy's Road Runner, Cooter's Tow Truck, Rosco and Enos's Police Cruisers, Boss Hogg's limousine and the infamous "Double Zero", the only car to ever beat the General Lee.

-- Hair-Raising Chases and Stunts: Take on Rosco and Boss Hogg in a single-player Adventure Mode containing over 15 missions, and an unlockable two player split-screen mode featuring destruction derby battles, head-to-head competition and hot pursuit.

New Racing Game Focuses on Crashes

Getting to the finish line first is good enough for most racing video games. Then there's "Burnout 3: Takedown," which puts a disarmingly enjoyable spin on the racing game: the bigger the wreck, the better.

Blending high velocities with jarring crashes, this new title from Electronic Arts offers a variety of racing styles on courses spanning the United States, Europe and Asia.

Mass destruction puts this one ahead of its competitors. You drive, slam and careen off ramps and into traffic to rack up as much destruction as possible. You can pick up special bonuses along the way that can push the damage into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Cause a suitably large pileup and you'll get a "Crashbreaker," an explosive

bonus you can detonate for additional flying bits of twisted metal and flaming tires. Enough of these big wrecks will unlock additional venues and new vehicles like sports cars, trucks and buses.

If only my daily commute could be this fun - sans the inevitable hospital visit, of course.

The graphics effectively conveyed an amazing illusion of speed.

The edges of the screen blurred as I roared down city streets and through twisting mountainside dirt roads at speeds that would be sure to catch the attention of any local TV news stations eager for a good high-speed chase.

Behind the wheel, the experience was as intense and focused as I've ever had while playing a video game.

Staring at a single point on the horizon, I swerved through one near-miss after another involving tractor-trailers, RVs and hapless motorists.

Such brushes with death are rewarded in the game's other modes, which include "Road Rage" and yes, plain old first-to-the-finish "Race" mode.

You're rewarded for tailgating, running your opponents over cliffs (hence the word takedown in the title) and suicidal drifts into oncoming traffic with a speed boost bar. Like a nitrous oxide tank for a real hot rod, you can use the boost whenever you need a neck-snapping dose of extra speed.

A new twist with this sequel is called "Aftertouch." During crashes, you can slow down the action like "The Matrix" films and move your burning heap of metal into more traffic or your opponents.

Like a skateboarder in slow motion, you can also use the aftertouch to perform additional tricks like hood slides, flips or bumper grinds.

It felt odd at first, but I grew fond of aftertouch because it gave me a much-needed chance to catch my breath.

The single player game is good for getting attuned to the responsive controls but as with most video games going online and competing against other people is the real challenge.

I had no problems connecting online with my PlayStation 2 and finding others to play against. As expected, I was much better at being the victim of a wreck instead of the instigator.

Excessive destruction runs rampant in this T-rated game for the PS2 and Xbox, but at least the smashing is limited to vehicles.

There are no guns and you can't go on blood-soaked, pedestrian-squashing rampages like you can in games such as "Grand Theft Auto: Vice City."

"Burnout 3" isn't going to win any first-place medals for realism but delivers a superb arcade experience. Besides, why would anyone want to simulate being stuck in gridlock?

Four stars out of four.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Amazon.com, Microsoft Sue Phishers

Amazon.com and Microsoft - two Washington state companies with a massive presence online - have teamed up to fight what is fast becoming the No. 1 scourge on the Internet.

The two companies have filed suit in the U.S. District Court in Seattle against a Canadian based phisher that targets consumers by spoofing Amazon.com’s well known Web site.

The suit alleges that Kitchener, Ontario-based Gold Disk Canada, along with several co-defendants, including Barry Head and his two sons, Eric and Matthew, mounted illegal and deceptive spamming campaigns that have misused Security and antivirus firms - not to mention consumer advocates - applauded loud and long over the opening of this latest front against online fraudsters.

"This is going to be fascinating to watch," says Carole Theriault, security consultant with Sophos.

"These are two huge household names, and the fact that they have joined together to take on phishers is bound to be a deterrent against other people who think phishing is an easy way to make money," she told NewsFactor.

The combined forces of Amazon and Microsoft pose a powerful legal threat against phishers. "The best way to stop spammers and phishers is to hit them hard in the pocketbook," Washington Attorney General Christine Gregoire says in a statement. "I am pleased to see Microsoft and Amazon.com team up and use our laws as they were intended."

Amazon.com has filed three other lawsuits in King County Superior Court in Seattle against unidentified defendants allegedly involved in phishing schemes designed to defraud Amazon.com customers.

Microsoft has filed a separate lawsuit against Leonid ("Leo") Radvinsky and his Chicago-based businesses Activsoft and Cybertania, along with several additional unidentified defendants against whom Amazon.com filed suit in August 2003.

That lawsuit alleges that Radvinsky sent millions of illegal and deceptive e-mail messages to MSN Hotmail customers, including messages that were falsely labeled as coming from Amazon.com.

Such proactive legal initiatives are just one front in the war against spam and online fraud.

Companies need to work with customers to educate them as to what are legitimate activities. And customers too need to assume some responsibility for protecting their computers, Theriault says.

Flood of Spam Continues, Despite Ban

Your inbox is probably flooded with spam, despite a federal anti-junk e-mail law that went into effect Jan. 1.

Spam still accounts for about 75 percent of all e-mail, according to Postini, a California-based e-mail filtering company.

Postini's Chris Smith says the overall volume of Spam is holding steady - but X-rated spam has dropped by about half since January. Smith says porno spam is now less than 1 percent of junk e-mail

Smith says spam remains a problem because junk e-mail works. He says e-mail is so cheap to send, a spammer just needs a few people to respond to make the effort profitable.

Anti-Spam Effort Killed Amid Patent Row

A row over intellectual property claims from Microsoft Corp. has dealt a fatal blow to an ambitious effort by Internet engineers to create a technical standard for curbing junk e-mail.

The failure to reach consensus on the Microsoft-championed proposal known as Sender ID throws back to the free market a process many consider urgent in view of the unabating onslaught of spam.

Sender ID's effectiveness and compatibility with existing mail systems were already in question before members of the Internet Engineering Task Force got hung up on the patent battle, said Yakov Shafranovich, a leading anti-spam activist.

The task force, which works by consensus on Internet standards, dissolved a working group on Sender ID last week after deciding that agreement could not be achieved anytime soon.

Some experts say the decision could speed up work on a different spam-control technology from Yahoo Inc., one seen as stronger but more difficult to implement.

The IETF is expected to create a working group as early as November to craft standards for digitally signing messages, an anti-spam approach Yahoo favors. Two other groups are in the works to explore additional approaches.

It's possible for two or more of these technologies to work in conjunction.

The Microsoft and Yahoo proposals, along with one being tested by America Online Inc., aim to tackle e-mail spoofing - the practice of sending messages that pretend to be from someone else, be it Bill Gates or a friend in your address book. The technology wouldn't eliminate spam, but it could help identify and block a common spam technique.

Under Sender ID, Internet service providers would submit lists of their mail servers' unique numeric addresses. On the receiving end, software

would poll a database to verify that a message was actually processed by one of those servers.

Microsoft has applied for a patent on the method for polling the database. Though the company promises to make the technology available for free, it wants to bar software developers from further licensing it - a restriction that several members of the open-source community find unacceptable.

As the Sender ID working group, formally known as MARID, began trying to craft a compromise on the patent issue, members resurrected technical concerns previously thought to have been settled. That's when the group's leaders decided to abandon the project.

Microsoft spokesman Sean Sundwall said the company would continue to push Sender ID regardless of the IETF's decision. He said smaller companies might hesitate without standards but larger ones won't change their plans.

"Once you get a critical mass of people adopting Sender ID, it becomes for the smaller sender critically important they adopt it as well," he said.

Andrew Newton, co-chairman of the working group, declined interview requests but put a positive spin on the developments in an e-mail statement.

"This is part of the IETF process asking the community to gather more experience with sender authentication schemes to get the final standard right," he wrote.

John Levine, who heads an Anti-Spam Research Group affiliated with the task force, said members couldn't come to terms because they had little real-world data.

But Dave Anderson, chief executive of Sendmail Inc., said he believes resolution would have been possible if not for the patent fight. Sendmail is testing various anti-spam schemes, including Microsoft's and Yahoo's.

Dave Crocker, an Internet pioneer with the Brandenburg InternetWorking consultancy, said heated debate during the standards-setting process is fairly common, but the one over spam is unusual because of a perceived need to rush.

Larger than the patent fight, he said, was the ambitious schedule for resolving fundamental technical difficulties.

"The normal approach is to proceed very cautiously," Crocker said. Major changes to the Internet architecture "always have unintended consequences and they are usually bad."

U.S. Cybersecurity Chief Abruptly Resigns

The government's cybersecurity chief has abruptly resigned from the Homeland Security Department amid a concerted campaign by the technology industry and some lawmakers to persuade the Bush administration to give him more authority and money for protection programs.

Amit Yoran, a former software executive from Symantec Corp., made his resignation effective Thursday as director of the National Cyber Security

Division, giving a single’s day notice of his intention to leave. He kept the job one year.

Yoran has privately confided to industry colleagues his frustrations in recent months over what he considers the department’s lack of attention paid to computer security issues, according to lobbyists and others who recounted these conversations on condition they not be identified because the talks were personal.

Yoran said Friday he "felt the timing was right to pursue other opportunities." It was unclear immediately who might succeed him even temporarily. Yoran’s deputy is Donald A. "Andy" Purdy, a former White House adviser on cybersecurity.

A department spokeswoman, Tasia Scolinos, praised Yoran as a valuable contributor. "Cybersecurity will continue to be a priority of the Department of Homeland Security, and we plan to move quickly to fill the position with someone who has demonstrated leadership in this important field," she said.

As cybersecurity chief, Yoran and his division - with an $80 million budget and 60 employees - were responsible for carrying out dozens of recommendations in the Bush administration’s "National Strategy to Secure Cyberspace," a set of proposals to better protect computer networks.

Yoran’s position as a director - at least bureaucratic three steps below Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge - has irritated the technology industry and even some lawmakers. They have pressed unsuccessfully in recent months to elevate Yoran’s role to that of an assistant secretary, which could mean broader authority and more money for programs.

Rep. Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., complained that Yoran’s surprise departure was "yet another setback in the effort to protect our nation’s cyber infrastructure," and described the efforts as "in complete disarray." Lofgren and Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, leaders on the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, have introduced a bill - now stalled in Congress - to make Yoran’s job an assistant secretary’s position.

Senior department officials consider equally important the protection of the nation’s physical structures, such as bridges and buildings, and computer networks, which regulate the flow of electricity, phone calls, finances and other information. They maintain that gauging risks to physical structures and computers separately is inefficient and expensive because common problems threaten both.

Under Yoran, Homeland Security established a cyber alert system, which sends urgent e-mails to subscribers about major virus outbreaks and other Internet attacks as they occur, along with detailed instructions to help computer users protect themselves.

It also mapped the government’s universe of connected electronic devices, the first step toward scanning them systematically for weaknesses that could be exploited by hackers or foreign governments. And it began routinely identifying U.S. computers and networks that were victims of break-ins.

"Amit’s departure provides a challenge for industry and its relationship with the department on cybersecurity," said Shannon Kellogg, director of government affairs for RSA Security Inc., a leading security firm. "He knew

how to get the job done."

Yoran effectively took over some responsibilities once assigned to Richard Clarke, a special adviser to President Bush, and to Howard Schmidt, who succeeded Clarke but left government during the formation of the Homeland Security Department to work as chief security officer at eBay Inc.

Yoran cofounded Riptech Inc. of Alexandria, Va., in March 1998, which monitored government and corporate computers around the world with an elaborate sensor network to protect against attacks. He sold the firm in July 2002 to Symantec for $145 million and stayed on as vice president for managed security services.

Microsoft Set to Ask Judge to Suspend Penalties

Microsoft Corp is ready to ask a judge on Thursday to suspend penalties imposed on it for violating antitrust law by using the monopoly of its Windows operating system to hurt competitors.

The hearing was set to begin at 9:30 a.m.

Court of First Instance President Bo Vesterdorf will hear two or three days of arguments before deciding whether to suspend the remedies. They would remain on hold until the case is completed years from now.

Microsoft argues the remedies will do it irreparable harm, while the European Commission - which imposed them last March - says their delay will make them irrelevant because the market will have moved on.

The U.S. software giant has already paid a record 497 million euros ($611.4 million) fine, a small portion of the company’s more than $50 billion in reserves.

The Commission ordered Microsoft to sell a version of its Windows operating system without Media Player audio-visual software to computers makers.

That way, computer makers can offer Windows with rival audio-visual such as RealNetworks RealPlayer.

Vesterdorf has asked Microsoft to explain why it could not offer a version of Windows without Media Player, as illustrated by RealNetworks in a demonstration at Microsoft’s hearing before the Commission.

The Commission also ordered Microsoft to make available protocols, or software rules, to rivals so their workgroup servers are on a level playing field when it comes to communicating with Microsoft desktop computers. Work group servers run printers and give access to files.

Microsoft said the order would impinge on its limited-time exclusive rights, including its patents, copyright and trademarks.

Vesterdorf has also asked Microsoft to explain why it should not share its protocols with many companies, since it has already agreed to share them with Sun Microsystems.

Microsoft must prove three things if it is to get the remedies suspended.

First, it must prove that its case is viable. Microsoft Chief Counsel Brad Smith said the company intends to make extensive arguments showing that it has a serious case and is likely to prevail.

It must also prove that it will suffer irreparable harm if the remedies are imposed and, finally, Microsoft must show that the balance of interests between the public and company favors it.

If Microsoft loses, it can further delay the imposition of the remedies by appealing to the highest court in the European Union, the Court of First Instance. If the Commission loses, it too may appeal.

Once the issue of the remedies is settled the case will move on to a three-judge panel. That panel will hear Microsoft's appeal of the European Commission's March decision.

Judge to Microsoft: Justify Freeze

A European Court judge pressed Microsoft on Thursday to explain why it would suffer irreparable harm if it followed EU orders to share technology with competitors.

But during more than three hours of questioning both sides, Court of First Instance President Bo Vesterdorf never tipped his hand to give clues as to whether he will grant Microsoft Corp's request to suspend penalties imposed on it by the European Commission.

The EU levied the sanctions in March after finding Microsoft violated antitrust law by using its Windows operating system monopoly to hurt competitors. The company wants the suspension until its appeal ends four or more years from now.

The Commission, the EU's executive, ordered Microsoft to make available its protocols, or software rules, to rivals so that their work-group servers are on a level playing field when it comes to communicating with Microsoft desktop computers. Work-group servers run printers and give access to files.

Microsoft lawyer Ian Forrester said the world's largest software company did not want to release the protocols because, "that which is licensed cannot be unlicensed. The bell once rung cannot be unrung."

But Vesterdorf said he had seen no claims the software giant would suffer an irreparable loss of market share for servers.

"There is no such indication," Vesterdorf said. "Loss of market share is normally taken into account" in assessing irreparable harm, he said.

Microsoft's Forrester disupted that statement, and, even after Vesterdorf cited a case to back it up, insisted that Microsoft nevertheless feared a loss of market share.

In order to win the suspension, Microsoft must show it will suffer irreparable harm. It is then for Vesterdorf to judge whether that harm is greater than the harm to rivals and the public if the suspension is lifted.

Microsoft must also show it has a plausible case, and Vesterdorf did say he

considered it "possible" that Microsoft would win the main case.

The Commission told the judge Microsoft is months late in coming up with a timetable to provide the protocols and has yet to reply to a letter it wrote on July 30 demanding them.

After repeated questioning from the judge, Microsoft lawyer Forrester promised that Microsoft would come up with a plan in "the reasonably near future ... three to four weeks."

The judge also questioned the EU executive, and disliked its response to a question about whether Microsoft's plan would be covered by copyright.

"The Commission has been in my opinion a bit evasive as to question of whether there are copyrights," he said.

Commission lawyer Fernando Castillo expressed surprise, replying, "We've dealt with this question in extreme detail."

Earlier, Microsoft and its opponents dueled over questions of fact that Vesterdorf will ultimately have to decide.

In more than seven hours of hearings, the sides likened the issues to, among other things, Darwinian evolution, typewriters, airports, and skyscraper building as they pressed their cases.

"This is the first time in competitive history that a company has been ordered to draw up a description of secret technology and deliver it to its competitors," Forrester said.

But a competitor, Samba, said Microsoft freely gave it protocols until its server software became popular, and poured scorn on the idea Microsoft spent millions developing them.

"The protocols are not secret because they're valuable; they're valuable because they're secret," Samba co-creator Jeremy Allison told the court.

He said that each time Microsoft updates its products, it can tweak the protocols so others cannot use them. "Microsoft builds on the work of others but makes small but critical changes."

Later, Microsoft's Forrester said Allison's facts were wrong, and Microsoft had spent millions on the protocols.

In March, the Commission found that Microsoft used the power of its Windows operating system, which it said held a virtual monopoly in personal computers, to cripple competitors and ordered the company to change the way it does business.

On Friday the judge will hear arguments over the Commission's order that Microsoft sell a version of its Windows operating system without Media Player audio-visual software to computer makers.

Microsoft has already paid a record 497 million euros ($611.4 million) fine.

Hackers Target Microsoft's JPEG Flaw

In a harbinger of security threats to come, hackers have exploited a newly announced flaw in Microsoft Corp. programs and begun circulating malicious code hidden in images that use the popular JPEG format.

Software tools to create the malicious images began appearing last month, and this week security experts saw images employing them posted on adult-oriented Usenet newsgroups.

To get the malicious code, a visitor must download the image and view it using Microsoft’s Windows Explorer software, said Oliver Friedrichs, senior manager with Symantec Security Response.

The computer then contacts a server to obtain code that would let an attacker take over the machine remotely.

Friedrichs said the current exploit is fairly limited but that he expects future attempts to create malicious images that would work on the more popular Outlook and Internet Explorer programs, also made by Microsoft.

The Internet Storm Center at the SANS Institute said an image it found, disclosed on the BugTraq security mailing list, only caused computers to crash in tests, but "we suspect that a working exploit is very close to widespread availability."

Computers with updated versions of anti-virus software should be protected, according to SANS center. Microsoft also has a software patch to fix the flaw and said users who have the Service Pack 2 security update for Windows XP are not affected.

Microsoft disclosed the flaw in question on Sept. 14. It affects people running Windows XP, Windows Server 2003 and later versions of Office.

People who have earlier versions of Windows or Office may also be affected if they are running some specialized applications, such as Digital Image Pro and Visio 2002. The flaw is in a technology that is used to render JPEG images.

Return of the Big, Bad Bagle

The notorious Bagle worm has reappeared, using the same modus operandi as its predecessors in attacking PCs worldwide.

Bagle.az (also known as Bagle.as) is a mass-mailing threat with its own SMTP engine for constructing outgoing e-mail messages.

As with previous Bagle variants, it gleans addresses from local files in a PC, then uses the harvested addresses in the "from" field to replicate and send itself with a spoofed return address.

This variant contains a remote-access component and copies itself to folders that have the string "shar" in the name, such as those created by common peer-to-peer applications, including KaZaa, Bearshare and Limewire.

Antivirus technology provider McAfee rated Bagle.az as a medium threat. PC users are advised to delete any e-mail containing the following subject lines: "Hello," "Thank you!" "Re: Thanks :)," or "Re: Hi." The infected

e-mail attachments may include the words "Price," "price," or "Joke."

The worm also attempts to short-circuit security applications and/or firewalls, along with any versions of the NetSky worm it detects on infected machines.

This is the 52nd version of Bagle to hit the Internet. It was given the medium-threat rating based on the worm's reputation, said Lysa Myers, a virus research engineer at McAfee. "We want to make people aware that this worm continues to be a problem, although this version appears to be less complex than some of the others," she told NewsFactor.

McAfee recommends that PC users make sure that their antivirus software is up to date, install a software or hardware firewall, and refrain from opening suspicious-looking e-mail attachments.

Controversy Delays Net Song-Swap Bill in Senate

A measure that would make it easier to sue online file-trading networks like Kazaa and Morpheus failed to advance in the Senate on Thursday because lawmakers said there was too much opposition.

Utah Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch said negotiators would meet later in the day to try to come up with a bill that would satisfy the entertainment and technology industries, which have been at loggerheads since the bill was introduced in June.

The bill, known as the Induce Act, was designed to target file-trading networks, which courts have so far shielded from entertainment-industry lawsuits on the grounds that they do not commit copyright infringement but merely make it possible.

The Induce Act would hold liable anyone who "induces" others to reproduce copyrighted material.

But makers of digital media players like Apple Computer Inc.'s iPod worry that they could be targeted as well, discouraging them from developing new products.

"If I have to, I will lock all of the key parties in a room until they come out with an acceptable bill that stops the bad actors and preserves technological innovation," Hatch said at a meeting of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which he chairs.

Hatch said his Judiciary Committee would take up the bill again next week, one day before Congress is scheduled to adjourn for the fall elections.

Hotmail Hopes To Block Spam with New Fee

Spammers - whatever their other characteristics - are persistent and creative. They employ a wide range of methods to hide their identities, including the use of such publicly available, Web-based services as MSN Hotmail, to fire off hundreds of thousands of e-mails at a time.

In an effort to stem the tide, Microsoft has announced that Hotmail users who choose to link to their Hotmail accounts with Microsoft Outlook or Outlook Express now will be charged a fee to do so. By April of 2005, no user - current or new - will be able to access the feature for free.

WebDAV - or Web-based distributed authoring and versioning - allows Hotmail users to write scripts that use e-mail clients, such as Outlook, to address and send many e-mails quickly. Thus, it is a popular feature with spammers.

Beginning this week, new users will need to subscribe to the WebDAV feature separately from their free Hotmail account. Over coming months, existing users will be asked to subscribe in order to retain access to the tool.

The Hotmail Plus service costs US19.95 per year, and the MSN Premium service costs 99.95 per year. That may not seem like much in the lucrative spam business, but given the number of accounts to which typical, large spam operations subscribe, it could add up.

Subscription services also require users to provide billing information, which is another deterrent to spammers, says Microsoft. MSN has seen an increase in spammers exploiting the WebDAV tool, which forced the company to make what it calls a "tough decision."

Of the 187 million current Hotmail accounts, 9.4 million - about 5 percent - are WebDAV-enabled.

Savvy Web Surfers Catch New Wave of Browsers

Since Microsoft won the browser wars in the late 1990s, its Internet Explorer software has been the way most people surf the Web. But with some slick new challengers on the scene, that may be about to change.

While Internet Explorer has remained largely unchanged for years, alternative Web browsers like Opera, Apple Computer’s Safari and especially Firefox are wowing users with innovative features and the promise of increased protection from hackers.

Firefox rose from the ashes of Netscape, the first popular Web browser, which kick-started the dot-com boom before being vanquished by Microsoft’s Internet Explorer. Netscape was then purchased by America Online, which donated the software’s code to the non-profit Mozilla Foundation.

After nearly three years of fits and starts, Mozilla has turned out a sleek, fast-running browser. While numbers are hard to come by, more than five million copies of the software have been downloaded in the last two months, and more than a million in the 10 days since its 1.0 "preview" version was released Sept. 15.

Most estimates put Internet Explorer’s overall market share at about 95 percent. But a shift can also been seen among the early adopter crowd, which picks up on technology trends months or years before the mainstream.

Nearly a fifth of the visitors to the geeky Web site Engadget (http://www.engadget.com) are using Firefox, compared with 53 percent using Internet Explorer, 11.3 percent using Safari and 2.5 percent using Opera.

"If our audience is the vanguard, I’m wondering if these stars are going to

become the norm in another year or two," wrote Jason Calacanis, chairman of The Weblogs Inc. Network, which owns Engadget.

The most impressive feature of the alternative browsers - present in Opera, Safari and Firefox, but absent in Internet Explorer - is tabbed browsing.

Many people run their Internet browsers all day, opening multiple windows if they want to visit several sites at once, or to keep their Hotmail or Yahoo page open all the time.

Tabbed browsing lets you open dozens of sites within a single window, saving space on your computer desktop. If there are a number of sites you visit daily, you can group them into a folder and open them all at once.

The three browsers also block pop-up advertisements, one of the most annoying aspects of Web surfing. Microsoft recently released an upgrade to its Windows operating system that blocks pop-ups.

Among the alternative browsers, only Firefox is open-source, which means that any computer programer can burrow into its code and add customized add-ons to automatically check an e-mail account, control a digital music player, and enable searches of Google, Amazon.com, eBay and the Internet Movie Database.

There are also some more advanced features that will probably appeal only to advanced users, like the ability to view RSS feeds - short text digests of Web sites - in the bookmarks menu.

Internet Explorer has become the target of numerous hacker attacks, reflecting a combination of well-known security flaws, the program’s tight integration into the Windows operating system and its overwhelming popularity among computer users.

The alternative Web browsers may prove safer if only because of their relative obscurity, presenting a smaller target for the computer programers who write computer viruses and worms.

They also avoid some features - such as Active X controls that lets a Web site install a small program on your computer - that have been blamed for Internet Explorer’s security flaws.

But there is a downside to each of the alternative browsers. Since Internet Explorer is still the industry standard, some pages may not appear correctly with Opera, Safari and Firefox.

Opera, created by two Norwegian programers, carries advertising - similar to text ads seen on Google - unless the user pays $35 for an ad-free version.

Safari is only available to the small percentage of Web users who use Apple computers. And Firefox has yet to put out a fully polished version, though it released a 1.0 "preview" version this month.

Web sites:

Opera (http://www.opera.com/)

Firefox (http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox/index.html)

Safari (http://www.apple.com/safari/)

Web Sites Spoof Bush, Kerry With Parodies

If you're not ready to feverishly debate Iraq or the deficit in this bitterly divisive election year, you can always surf the Web, where politics is frequently nothing but a big joke.

President Bush and challenger John Kerry are spoofed as utter fools on the Internet daily, usually in good fun.

The most popular online diversion comes from JibJab Media Inc., an online animation outfit in Santa Monica, Calif.

Its Flash animation parody, featuring Bush and Kerry taking shots at each other to the tune of "This Land is Your Land," has been viewed more than 65 million times since its July release.

"The thrust of the piece is how silly and juvenile the back and forth can be, and that resonated with people," said Gregg Spiridellis, 33, who created the piece with his 30-year-old brother, Evan. "It's a pretty ugly election year, and our piece just happens to be something people (from opposing parties) can share and laugh together."

Online political humor offers a way for Americans "to keep their sanity," said David Abel, editor of the PoliticsOnline newsletters. "It kind of allows people to loosen up a little bit and take a little breather and maybe realize that there's a lot at stake here, but we have to at least not kill ourselves in the process."

Many of the online games and cartoons are nonpartisan - Spiridellis calls his an "equal opportunity offender" - and are designed mostly to make money.

"This Land" has been forwarded around the world and occasionally lands in the mailboxes of advertising executives, leading to new business, Spiridellis said. It also got television producers' attention; a sequel is set to premiere on "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno" in early October, he said.

"This Land" is among parodies available at Mock the Vote, an ad-supported site from AtomFilms.

The video games industry has also weighed in. Games that let you manage simulated campaigns include "The Political Machine" from Ubisoft Entertainment and "Frontrunner" from Lantern Games. Each costs under $25. You buy ads, barnstorm around the country and hire operatives.

In a free game called "Staffers," you maneuver your character around a campaign office, answering phones, opening mail, greeting visitors and drinking coffee. It's mostly a promotion for a show by the same name on the Discovery Times cable channel.

Others are less promotional and more partisan.

In "Bushgame" from Emogame, Hulk Hogan, the He-Man and Mr. T try to save the White House from corporate interests. Players get "lessons" on the deficit and environmental policy along the way.

"The Subservient President," itself an online parody of Burger King's Subservient Chicken ad campaign, has the president responding to your commands. Type "start a war" and an actor with a Bush mask magically transforms Osama bin Laden into Saddam Hussein.

Not to be outdone, the Bush campaign site has "Kerry's Flip Flop Olympics" where you must determine the correct order of the Democrat's opposing stances on the same topics.

And separate Bush and Kerry sloganators let you generate fake campaign posters with less-than-flattering slogans.

The Internet is truly democratizing political humor, said Steve Schneider, a political science professor at the State University of New York's Institute of Technology.

Through forward-to-a-friend features, a funny or thoughtful item makes the rounds much more quickly than a joke from late-night television, said Michael Cornfield, senior research consultant at the Pew Internet and American Life Project.

Web journals known as blogs have helped circulate such humorous tidbits as a remix of the infamous Howard Dean scream by newspaper columnist James Lileks.

Some items can be downright cruel or violent.

Liquid Generation has torture chambers where scatalogical games involve humiliating Bush and Kerry with wedgies and elephant dung.

The object of one game on Comedy Central's site is to whack Kerry operatives with a golf club if they get too close to the White House. (If you hit Condoleeza Rice by mistake, you lose points.)

In "Bush Shoot-out" from Miniclip, the president shoots masked gunmen from behind his Oval Office desk.

Beyond the entertainment, can any of these influence the election?

Their creators say that's doubtful.

"I'm pretty sure we're preaching to the choir," said Dale McFarland, 53, a Dallas musician who runs the anti-Bush humor site The Specious Report.

Adds Spiridellis, "If anybody watches our cartoon and made a voting decision, we'd be frightened."

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On the Net:

"This Land" and other parodies: http://mockthevote.com

"Staffers": http://staffersgame.com

"Bushgame": http://bushgame.com

"The Subservient President": http://subservientpresident.net

"Kerry's Flip Flop Olympics": http://georgewbush.com/Olympics

Dean scream remix: http://www.lileks.com/bleatophany

http://www.comedycentral.com/tv_shows/indecision2004

The Specious Report: http://thespeciousreport.com

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